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Military

## Pentagon is investigating deadly 'friendly fire' case

By Stewart M. Powell

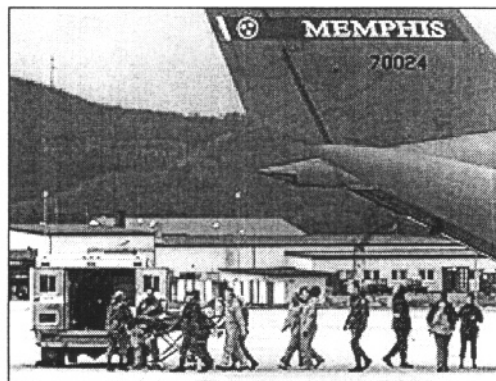
Hearst Washington Bureau

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WASHINGTON — The Pentagon launched a probe Wednesday into what went wrong when a bomb from a B-52 killed three GIs and wounded 19 others in the worst case of "friendly fire" since the Persian Gulf War.

Navy Rear Adm. John Stufflebeem, deputy director for operations with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said U.S. bombing operations against Taliban targets will continue as the investigation is carried out.

U.S. warplanes continue targeting the Taliban stronghold of Kandahar in the south and a mountainous area near the Khyber Pass south of Jalalabad, where officials suspect terror suspect Osama bin Laden and top lieutenants might be hiding in caves and tunnels.



Medical staff wheel a wounded U.S. Special Forces soldier on a stretcher to a waiting ambulance at the Ramstein U.S. Air Base, western Germany Thursday.

AP Photo/Frank Rumpenhorst

The latest casualties raised to 29 the number of Americans killed and wounded in Afghanistan since military operations began Oct. 7 — with 27 of the casualties falling victim to so-called "friendly fire," the term applied to wartime fratricide.

The Pentagon identified those killed as Master Sgt. Jefferson Donald Davis, 39, of Watauga, Tenn.; Sgt. 1st Class Daniel Petithory, 32, of Cheshire, Mass.; and Staff Sgt. Brian Cody Prosser, 28, of Frazier Park, Calif.

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All were members of the Army's 3rd Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group, stationed at Fort Campbell, Ky.

Five allied Afghan soldiers died in Wednesday's accident, and an undetermined number of other Afghan troops were injured.

Officials said the battlefield accident took place in clear daylight at 10 a.m. local time after a U.S. special forces soldier called for close air support to help anti-Taliban forces quell Taliban resistance north of Kandahar.

A high-altitude, long-range B-52 dropped bomb equipped with a 2,000-pound warhead, which is capable of using global positioning satellites and inertial navigation to maneuver 15 miles to within 40 feet of a target. The bomb exploded barely 100 yards from the allied troops' position.

Hamid Karzai, the southern Pashtun leader and newly designated head of the provisional government in Afghanistan, was near the area where the bomb exploded, but was not seriously wounded, Pentagon officials said.

Karzai's forces are one of two opposition groups attacking the last concentration of Taliban forces in Kandahar, the militia's spiritual home in southern Afghanistan.

"We're seeing reports of Taliban digging in, building or erecting defensive positions," Rear Adm. John Stufflebeem told reporters at the Pentagon.

At the same time, U.S. Marines, operating from a base within striking distance of Kandahar, positioned themselves to cut off roads and other likely paths for vehicles that Taliban and al-Qaida fighters might use in fleeing Kandahar, said Maj. James Parrington, a senior commanding officer here.

Parrington's statement is the clearest indication yet that U.S. ground troops might be about to engage in combat.

*The Associated Press and the Washington Post contributed to this report.*

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